



Nutrient Management

Developing a nutrient management plan (NMP) is not only a good idea but it just makes good business sense. Nutrient management refers to controlling the amount, source, placement, form, and timing of plant nutrients and soil amendments. How does this translate into a sound land management business practice? Producers who implement NMPs are able to minimize fertilizer costs; increase the nutrient efficiency of their cropping systems; comply with mandated environmental regulations; and decrease potential negative impacts of nutrients on the environment.

NMPs vary in complexity from providing a budget for all potential sources of nutrients to planning amendment applications to improve the condition of a soil.

“Nutrient management is an essential practice for a cropland agriculture resource management system,” states Jim Sharkoff, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservation Agronomist, Lakewood, CO. *“For crop producers, the process begins with a soil test to evaluate the fertility status of the soil. Then the nutrient requirement for the crop to be grown is determined based on realistic yield goals.”*

NRCS recommends nutrient management plans for cropland resource management systems because they help landowners 1. Budget and supply nutrients for plant production; 2. Properly utilize manure and organic by-products as a plant nutrient source; 3. Minimize agricultural nonpoint source pollution of water supplies; 4. Protect air quality; and 5. Improve the physical and biological condition of soil.

At a minimum, nutrient management plans include aerial site photographs or field maps, and a soils map; the current and/or planned production sequence or crop rotation;

soil test results and recommended nutrient application rates, form, placement, and timing.

NMPs may stand alone or combined with other practices to make up a management system.

The complexity of nutrient management plans is as varied as their purposes for planning and application. Therefore, it is highly recommended that landowners considering developing and implementing an NMP, contact their local NRCS field office or Conservation District.

While nutrient management is an essential practice for cropland, it is only one piece of the conservation planning puzzle,” states Jeff Burwell, NRCS State Resource Conservationist, Lakewood, CO. Producers are encouraged to visit their local NRCS field office for information about developing a resource management system for their agricultural operation.”